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Fire-Light Reflections

FIRE-LIGHT REFLECTIONS

BY

JAMES BRADSHAW BEVERLEY.

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"MEADOWVILLE"

FEBRUARY, 1905.

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TO
OUR GREAT PRESIDENT, THEODORE ROOSEVELT,
THE FOREMOST OF ALL RULERS IN THE
ADVOCACY OF UNIVERSAL ARBITRATION,
THIS LITTLE POEM IS DEDICATED BY
A SOUTHERN DEMOCRAT,

Fire-Light Reflections.

I love to sit by the open fire
When the night comes in, ere the lamps are lit,
Its ghostly shadows stalk behind
Except where the flame-beams dance and flit.
The wind without blows cold and loud,
But this only adds to the peace within,
And I think of the comforts that man has wrought
In spite of the Curse of Sin.

My dear little wife sits across the hearth—
I silently ponder, she wants to talk,
Like the crackling fire her thoughts leap in words
While mine like the ghost-shades stalk ;
And as the shadows close again
When cleft by the fire-flashed sparks,
So my serious vein returns on me
After each of her light remarks.

The work that man has done—his brain
Turning crude Nature's laws about,
Extracting Facts from heaps of Doubt,
By patient care, by toil and pain,
Changing all to his needs or gain—
My wife here flashes out

"I saw old Liza Shorts out at The Plains to-day,
 I wonder how long it's been since she last went away?"
 Said I, "I thought (I thought not, merely said)
 That that old negro had for years been dead."
 "Dead! Spry, and just as gaudily bedecked
 As when, a child, I first can recollect
 Her cooking for the Washingtons"—Again
 My thoughts resume their graver train.

The sticks of stubborn oak before my eyes
 Into gray ashes fall, or blue-gray smoke arise;
 A shovelful of mineral ash
 The visible remains
 Of Nature's work for many years
 With patient toil and pains.

Doubtless four centuries ago
 Its acorn germ began to grow,
 Sent down its first deploying root,
 Shot up its tender light green shoot
 Through covering trash;
 And year after year sucked the roots beneath,
 While above each summer its green lungs breathed.
 Below from the beds of chromes and slates
 It lifted the potash and silicates,
 Its stones but microscopic grains,
 Which it floated up through tiny veins,
 Its foliage green,
 Cements with carbonous hydrates,
 Drunk from the air that circulates

Its leaves between.
 Molecules of heat are stored away,
 Drawn from the sun. 'Till day by day,
 And cell on cell,
 The horny trunk and limbs are made,
 Throwing their canopy of shade
 Across the dell.

Its pinnacle first lighted by the sun
 Signals the valley morning has begun ;
 At sunset, lit by the last crimson ray,
 Wig-wags the world the end of each short day.
 Imagination takes us back through years
 And many a long-gone episode appears—
 The fierce bald-eagle seeks this airy perch
 From whence to make his deadly downward lurch
 Upon the mountain kid.
 The she-wolf's young snarl from the glade
 At that long hump of tawny shade,
 Where only partly hid,
 The panther's hungry fangs await
 The coming of the roebuck's mate.
 Oftimes, no doubt, beneath this giant oak,
 The Chiefs of many an Indian tribe
 Have met, the pipe of peace to smoke,
 Their treaties make, their rights and bounds prescribe.

Here in the ground
 The feathered Sachem plants his upright lance,

As signal to his braves the weird war-dance

Must circle 'round.

In horrid paint and plumes they form their circle here,

Each brandishing a bow, a tomahawk, a spear,

A knotted club, or scalping knife to show

In pantomime how he has slain a foe,

Now creeping, each in turn his weapon slants,

Now each in turn his deeds of valor vaunts.

And now in unison they croon their doleful chants,

At last, as victors all, they wildly yell and prance.

Gone long ago this pantomimic show.

Gone the wild red man with his spear and bow.

And now has gone this oak that saw them go.

Two days ago I heard its crashing fall awake

The echoes in each sleeping glen and glade,

And knew what Nature took four centuries to make,

Man had in one short active hour unmade.

So on this changing sphere each day is lost in night,

Each Summer's blooms appear to fade with winter's blight,

Even on Birth Death marks his claim, and all that grows must fall,

The bells and sexton are the same for wedding or for pall.

The laws of gravitation use each rain

To move the mighty mountains grain by grain,

And with them fill the hollows of the plain.

By Nature—greatest of all engineers—

Working unceasing through the endless years,

The valley fills, the mountain disappears.

Where now o'er fifty fathoms speeds the flying ship,
 By some great seismic subterranean slip,
 A mountain from the ocean waves will rise—
 The sea's foundation rocks shot to the skies—
 He shakes the sea-brine from his coral hair
 This new born Titan, and with stony stare

Looks o'er the wave.

His mouth and chin

Form in a grin

As he reflects

How many ships upon his sides

Will break to wrecks,

How many sailors 'neath his tides

Will find their grave.

Nor end the changes here, as day must follow night,
 Known islands disappear and new ones come in sight,
 So too wax and wane the moons, ebbs and flows the tide,
 So the trade-winds, the monsoons, come but can't abide.
 Why must all things vary so, seasons follow seasons,
 Generations come and go—what are nature's reasons?

Man himself, from nothing springing,

At his coming nothing bringing,

Spends his fleeting hour in making,

Goes, but nothing with him taking.

And, too, the lives of nations differ from
 The life of one man only in the length
 Of time they live. From nothing both must come,

By growth and work attain their wealth and strength.
 And some there are of men and nations both
 Who fated seem to fall before their prime ;
 And some, of stronger or of healthier growth,
 Hold Life and Strength beyond the average time.
 Both bear the Curse of Sin and must
 Spend all their lives in Toil and fierce contending,
 Constructing from creative dust,
 Preserving from the moth and rust,
 To their own needs the powers of Nature bending.
 Either stopping thieves or thieving ;
 Either crushing or relieving.

Throughout the story of the human race
 This inconsistent difference is made
 Between the man and nation.
 If I should want my weaker neighbor's place,
 And while he on his knees for mercy prayed,
 I slew and robbed him—without other cause—
 The penalty of death must then be paid
 With my own life, according to the laws
 Of man since the creation.
 Death to the man who kills his weaker brother,
 But glory when one nation kills another !
 And History condensed to brief narration
 Is international assassination.

The Hebrews under General Joshua Nun
 Slew Jericho and Ai—at Ajalon,
 In order that the deed might be completely done,

We read the Lord of Hosts held up the sinking sun.
And what is there in Chronicles and Kings
Besides a record of their murderings.

Long promised, long prophesied, long sought, to the World
came God's own Son,

He came not exactly as he ought, nor did as he should have
done ;

He ought to have been the earthly son of the High Priest of
the Jews,

And Herod, the Tetrarch, should have been won with
cringing interviews.

(Alas for him who fails to placate the biased Powers that Be !

The Narrow-brained Church, the venal State, the Priest and
the Sadducee)

So they dogged Him around some thirty years,

With shrewd editorial lies and jeers,

'Till they taught the people He came to save

To think Him a cross between crank and knave.

—Blame not those Jews too soon, I pray,

We do the very same thing to-day,

In a more prolonged and cruel way

Than nailing Him to a tree.

Adown through the darkened^d ages flung like the beam from
a lonely star,

Up through the Dust of Oblivion sprung as an oak spreads
its limbs afar ;

Out o'er the pitiless Earth-storms rung as the Bernardine guide-
bells are,

As sweet as the songs by seraphs sung to a heavenly tuned
 guitar,
 His divine Words have lived and His Truths have spread
 With strength to the Living and hope for the Dead—
 Like a web 'round the spinning Earth they've clung yet strong
 as an iron bar—
 'Till to every people they're taught and read
 From icy Spitzbergen's frosted tongue, or the peasants on
 crystal Aar,
 Down to where the malarial mists are hung o'er the slaves of
 Zanzibar.

But oh the Pity of it ! Oh the shame !
 The inconsistent criminal neglect !
 Though millions now His Words and Faith proclaim,
 So few the Great Announcement recollect.
 Throughout the world we celebrate His birth,
 But where or when,
 Oh Christian men !
 Was "Peace on Earth?"

Man's cruelty to man still horrifies mankind,
 And Justice seems to be as deaf as she is blind.

Now while the church-bells' glad tintabulation
 Floats o'er the land of every Christian Nation
 In honor of Christ's birth commemoration—
 A holiday, a feast, a celebration—
 While "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" is swelling
 From many a crowded church, or lonely dwelling ;
 While "Peace on Earth, Good Will to Men" is ringing

And "Tidings of Great Joy to Man we're Bringing"—
 What are those sounds in cold Manchuria's regions,
 Those long entrenchments and those serried legions?
 While the cooing of the Dove of Peace floats from each
 Christian home,
 There red-eyed Battle snaps his teeth and snarls through bloody
 foam.
 The torn-up earth, the blood-soaked soil show gashes of his
 fang
 From where the cold unburied dead
 Around Port Arthur's slopes are spread,
 To where the Shake's waves run red past smoking Liaoyang.

Nor does the Winter's temperature below
 The zero point, its blizzards or its snow
 Arrest the fearful carnage. There upon
 The narrow winding banks of frozen Hun,
 The raging men and raging skies compete,
 The burning shrapnel with the freezing sleet—
 And death in both, for, horror worst of all,
 The ice-winds freeze the wounded while they crawl.

From grim Port Arthur, where this war begun,
 About two hundred miles to where upon
 The scarce dividing banks of little Hun
 The dead-locked armies answer gun for gun,
 In one short year o'er this short space were spread
 Two hundred thousand Jap and Russian dead.
 Upon the near-by coast, destroyed by shell or mine,
 Full fifty ships of war lie underneath the brine.

In vain the white-winged Dove
 Flies o'er the crimson flood,
 Nor finds a lasting perch
 Unstained by human blood !

Alas the Herald angels sadly moan
 To hear, at Christmas tide, the Christian Czar

In Jesus' name hark on his dogs of war !
 And see a Christian Priest, with blest ikon,
 Leading the blood begrimed warriors on !
 Back on the winds they must have flown,

Fast and afar,
 To worlds unknown,
 Some soft-rayed star,

That never is by battle torn,
 Nor feels artillery's jar,
 Nor hears sweet woman's woeful groan,
 When war has left her all alone,
 Of husband, sons and brothers shorn ;
 Where martial cloaks are never worn

And conflicts never mar ;
 Where Truth is taught and Justice strewn,
 Where Universal Peace is sown,
 And Love and Mercy are.

* * * *

The Aryan race
 Cradled—modern ethnologists suppose—
 Somewhere 'mid central Asia's mountain snows

'Tis thought some several thousand years ago
 Began their borders first to overflow,

The Western waste

Their destination.

Resistless, merciless, devouring,

Tribes and nations overpowering,

They never ceased their bloody swath to mow,

Until the broad Atlantic's tidal flow

Checked for a space

Their great migration.

Here for centuries its waters

Circumscribed their western borders,

And its roaring seemed as orders

Not to risk too far its waves,

'Till at length a man of daring—

Naught for storm and dangers caring—

Boldly several ships preparing

All the unknown terrors braves.

Where is found a mortal story,

Modern or with ages hoary,

That can emulate in glory

Brave Columbus and his band?

Not through all the written pages,

Not through all the crumbling ages,

Deeds of warriors or of sages

Quite so simple, near so grand!

Greater good to man has never

Come from any man's endeavor;

Good which lives and grows forever,
 Blessing all the human race.
 Of all wisdom make one saying,
 Of all fighting make one slaying,
 To one's credit all arraying,
 Still he takes the second place.

Sweeping flockwise o'er the water
 Like white clouds the Aryans crowd ;
 To the Red Man sword and slaughter,
 Scarce a breathing halt allowed ;
 Quarter is not asked nor given—
 Like red dust their tribes are driven
 Westward by the white storm-cloud.

Forests fall before their axes,
 Cities rise beneath their skill.
 And this Aryan people waxes
 Strong and numerous, until,
 Such their growth has been the fact is,
 Having leaped Pacific's ocean,
 Having swept around the earth,
 They will end their westward motion
 In the land that gave them birth.

Yet what was the compensation
 To Columbus? What oblation
 For this new-found-world donation?
 Was it wealth and lordly station?
 Greatest shame for greatest deed!

Empty short-lived acclamation,
 Then a brief incarceration,
 Left when aged to privation,
 Dying actually in need.

Even to this generation,
 Nowhere has a race or nation
 Builded fit commemoration
 To the man who found this land.
 The United States now towers
 Far above all Western Powers,
 Plainly then the duty's ours,
 Plainly is the time at hand.

When Culebra's rocks are riven,
 When the salt waves of the seas
 'Tween his feet are rushed and driven
 Rising to his flinty knees.
 By our special invitations
 All the navies of the world
 Shall draw up in line by nations,
 All their thousand flags unfurled.

In the lead the Eagle soaring,
 Loud the World's artillery roaring,
 All the thousands madly cheering
 At such feat of engineering :
 Onward through they march !
 Forward look ! the sky-line scanning—
 See ! the wide canal-way spanning,

Lifting well its crown to heaven
 Where the mountain ridge is riven,
 Far above the top-masts vaulting,
 Massive, beautiful, exalting,
 The Columbian Arch !

Greatest Architect should plan it,
 Fast its feet be sunk in granite,
 And of marble make the keystone,
 Colon's bust upon the east-stone—
 Facing the Pacific shore
 Carve the image of Balboa.

Then must follow the unveiling
 Of two groups on topmost railing
 Where the Archway centres.
 In each group two heroes standing,
 Each way the Canal commanding :
 They this channel's Mentors.

Washington, imposing, splendid,
 Firmly grasps the hand extended
 Of great Bolivar, the hero
 Who expelled the Spanish Nero
 From his native land.
 Of the new world these the Castor
 And the Pollux. Alabaster
 Patriots they, on whom Disaster
 Only fixed Resolve the faster.
 Fought 'gainst sword and Indian arson,

Spanish priest and English parson,
 Britain's pound and Spain's piastre,
 Over all each proved a master
 —Monarchy-expelling master—
 Empire-builders—empires vaster
 Than the builders planned.

On the western rail another
 Pair of chieftains face each other,
 —The east group almost repeating—
 Roosevelt is Amador greeting.
 These the men whose quick decision
 In their purpose, and precision
 In their actions, saved these waters
 From the crimson stain of slaughters ;
 From the blood of nations blended,
 From a strife which might have ended
 In these continents hereafter
 Being hostile. Ah we have to,
 And we love to give them glory,
 And we love to tell the story,
 Tell it here to all the nations,
 Carve, so future generations
 Here may read 'till History ends
 That this Arch is built to tether
 These two Continents together,
 But as brother clasping brother.
 By these waters flowing under,
 By these mountains cleft asunder,
 By this Archway vaulting o'er,

By Columbus and Balboa,
 By these ships beneath us sailing,
 By these heroes on the railing,
 By that fluttering snow-white banner
 —To the Prince of Peace, Hosanna!—
 While this Archway holds together,
 While these oceans kiss each other,
 Pan-Americans are friends.

* * * * *

Ah! my back log's fall'n to embers,
 And my little wife remembers
 Liza Shorts in childhood-dreams.
 It is time I too were sleeping,
 For, the flames no longer leaping,
 The ghost-shades are closer creeping;
 Through my window—after peeping—
 Shyly come the cold moon's beams:
 Doubtless they would be advising
 One o'clock's their hour of rising,
 Such late hour is not in keeping
 With a farmer who must rise
 Ere the daybreak tints the skies.



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